

The Scottish Storytelling Festival this week

By Marie Montondo

In world where high-tech entertainment is the norm, some think that oral storytelling is a mostly extinct art form, outdated and irrelevant in this day and age. A trip to The Scottish Storytelling Centre's Storytelling Festival, however, might prove that this is anything but true.

This year marks the Centre's 22nd annual Storytelling festival, with 45 events throughout the city of Edinburgh, and more across Scotland. Until October 29, local and international artists gather to share and exchange stories, of personal and cultural significance.

"Storytelling is an important part of the heritage of the nation," said Tom Muir, one of over 45 storytellers performing in the festival. Tom, an Orkney native who tells stories of the Northern Isles, explained that storytelling allows people to see little cultural differences even in geographically small areas.

"The same story will vary from place to place in the islands and will change from family to family, from individual to individual," he said, explaining that oral stories take on personal significance that books and films lack. Tom's stories have changed throughout his life to reflect his experiences. "You make it your own, and it becomes your story that you're telling."

The stories told at this year's festival are built around an Island theme. Incorporating tales from both Scottish and Mediterranean Islands, festival organizers say that participants will be able to both celebrate local heritage and

experience new cultures. Furthermore, by pairing stories from Scottish Islands with those from the Mediterranean, the Centre hopes to demonstrate connections between apparently distinct countries.

“When you look through the history and folklore of Scotland and the Mediterranean a lot of them are very similar,” said Lindsay Corr, the Centre’s marketing director. She explained that many of the Scottish and Mediterranean folktales even share the same characters:” It proves that across the world the stories go so far back and they are all interlinked.”



A central component of the festival is the performance of the Odyssey, the epic poem about the ancient Greek hero, Odysseus. Starting on Monday, part of the poem will be told each night by a different person, until two final events on 29 October, when several musicians and performers will come together to tell the full story.

““It’s allowed us to bring storytelling to a large stage and really showcase that this can be just as entertaining as the other art forms out there, and that it can be put on a large scale,” says Lindsay.

To increase the scale of this year’s events the Centre has chosen to feature musicians and dancers from outside Scotland for the first time. According to Lindsay, the inclusion of these performances will hark back to days when music, dance and storytelling went “hand in hand,” as a way for societies to pass information from one generation to the next.

As well as offering storytelling performances, the Centre hopes to promote storytelling in the general public by holding “Tell-A-Story Day” on October 28. This outreach programme encourages organizations across the UK to host storytelling events of their own- so far, over 100 events have been

planned. The Centre facilitates these events providing guides for planning and promotion, and offers to register them on their website. The goal of these small storytelling events is to strengthen local communities and create a sense of shared identity between people.

The festival also includes a number of training events for people who want to learn more about the skills behind storytelling. According to the Centre, storytelling is a useful skill for people in all careers, and the workshops' relaxed, informal style allows even those who may be apprehensive to benefit. With typically group sizes ranging from 10-20, Lindsay said:- "it's a nice size where you don't feel singled out, but it's small enough so you can ask all the questions that you want."

With training, storytelling, music, and dance events in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen, and on 14 Scottish Isles, this year marks the most ambitious Storytelling Festival the Centre has seen. They hope to attract over 20,000 audience members, with a good amount of attendance in locations as remote as Mull and the Fair Isle.

The Festival is on now until October 30. Tickets are on sale from the Scottish Storytelling Centre Box Office at 43-45 High Street. For the full programme, [visit the website.](#)